“It Is Necessary to Draw a Lesson”
The Development of Political Structures of the Warsaw Treaty Organization between 1985 and 1989

Matěj Bílý
Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague

In May 1985, the Warsaw Treaty Organization completed the first three decades of its existence. The military and political alliance of the Eastern Bloc countries had undergone substantial changes during this period. In the era of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, the organization’s functioning was reflecting the overall style of his not too consistent foreign policy, which was basically composed of a motley collection of poorly harmonized campaigns not thought out in depth. Meetings of the alliance were thus very irregular and generally convened for the sole purpose of proclaiming support to current Soviet initiatives. After Khrushchev’s fall, the new Soviet leadership headed by Leonid Brezhnev attempted to stabilize the Eastern Bloc. These efforts also included the implementation of more systematic cooperation within the hitherto inconsistently functioning Warsaw Pact.¹ The Soviet dominance in the alliance was not to be affected, but the other members were to be given a feeling of a greater respect on the part of Moscow, which was supposed to strengthen their loyalty towards the organization. The changes implemented during Brezhnev’s era did not make the Warsaw Treaty the prime mover of events

in the Soviet sphere of interest in Europe. The alliance’s structures were not too active in this respect, and the agenda of meetings therefore was, as a rule, decided in Moscow. Political activities of the Warsaw Treaty were not determining developments in the Eastern Bloc – on the contrary, they were reflecting the general situation in the region, changing strategies of Kremlin, and the evolution of the relationship between the Soviet Union and its European satellites. Symptomatically, the organization’s political activities were culminating at the time of the biggest foreign policy offensive of Brezhnev’s leadership – the efforts aimed at détente since the end of the 1960s until the mid-1970s. With the onset of the subsequent period of Brezhnev’s regime, the Warsaw Pact somewhat fell into passivity as well. At that time, the Soviet Union unsurprisingly did not act as a de facto hegemon in the organization most of the time, although there were some exceptions to it. The fact that the Soviet Union was treating, from the 1970s, other members of the Warsaw Pact more tactfully and with at least some measure of respect, no matter how illusory that respect might have been, was not enough for the Warsaw Treaty to shed its image of a tool of the Soviet political and military oppression. Half-baked attempts to modify its mechanisms during the short spells of Soviet leaders Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko reflected the finding that the existing foreign policy of the Soviet Union was untenable and needed changes. Still, the Warsaw Pact remained fully tied to Cold War reality characterized mainly the geopolitical division into the Eastern and Western Bloc.

Research into the history of the Warsaw Treaty Organization has advanced a lot in the last decade. First monographs based on archival documents and mapping selected segments of the organization’s history, and not just through the prism of individual member states,2 started appearing. However, the period after 1985, i.e. after Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of Soviet communists, has hitherto been covered only

---

in a very basic manner. A deeper analysis of how the alliance was operating at that time and how important it was is absent. The presented study attempts to fill in the “white spot.” Using results of archival research in Czech, German and Polish archives and published sources, it analyzes substantial changes in the functioning of political structures of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in practice, which occurred between 1985 and 1989, i.e. between the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and the fall of state socialist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. The understanding of the shifts can significantly facilitate further research of the Warsaw Pact in Gorbachev’s era, in particular its agenda and its role in the power system of the Soviet sphere of interest in Eastern Europe in the final phase of the Cold War. It can also provide an initial framework for an analysis of the dynamic change of policies of each member state, which was taking place at that time. The study covers the period till the end of 1989. As a matter of fact, the dramatic events of those days substantially influenced the future functioning of the Warsaw Pact, a proper evaluation of which would require both more space and further research.

The study focuses on political bodies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and does not reflect developments in its military structures. This approach is, in my opinion, justified, the main reason being that the Warsaw Pact’s political and military structures were, to a substantial degree, operating separately. Although armed forces of the Eastern Bloc countries were always subordinated to political power, the alliance’s military bodies did acquire some degree of autonomy in the 1970s. Leading state and Communist Party representatives of member countries were notified of the agenda of forthcoming military negotiations, but they were only expressing their formal consent with them and were not interfering with their course at all. Romania and particularly the Soviet Union were exceptions to the above rule. The Soviet political leadership was regularly checking the agenda proposed by the alliance’s Command of Unified Forces and, if necessary,
made corrections to it. A preliminary analysis of military sources from the period dealt with in this study confirms what former Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak said, namely that the situation had prevailed even during Gorbachev’s era, some minor changes notwithstanding. Moreover, we have just a rudimentary idea of complex workings of the alliance’s military structures after 1985. A meaningful examination of the relationship between military bodies of the Warsaw Pact and political leaderships of member countries, particularly the Soviet Union, requires a more detailed analysis. At the same time, one must bear in mind that the Warsaw Treaty Organization was not fulfilling only a military role, but had always retained a significant political dimension, deep-rooted opinions notwithstanding. As a matter of fact, its summits were dealing, first and foremost, with foreign policy matters, not dwelling too deeply on military issues. As shown below, this feature was strengthened in Gorbachev’s era, and the Soviet leadership was increasingly treating the Warsaw Pact as a political grouping. The purpose of the study is to clarify and evaluate, using primary sources, appreciable changes in the operation and form of political structures of the alliance after 1985, to assess them in the context of previous developments, and to outline their significance for the fate of the Warsaw Treaty Organization after 1989.

New Visions

The first trip abroad of Mikhail Gorbachev after his advancement to the post of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led to the Polish capital, where a summit of member countries of the Warsaw Pact took place on 26 April 1985. Its purpose was to sign a protocol prolonging the existence of the alliance by another 20 years, with a possibility of a subsequent extension by another decade. It was the first direct encounter of the new Soviet leader with the organization as such; Gorbachev had never attended its meeting before. The meeting, which was somewhat ceremonial and partly substituted the

5 This confirms, for example, former Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak, who attended the meetings of the Warsaw Pact. NOWAK, Jerzy: Od hegemonii do agonii: Upadek Układu Warszawskiego – polska perspektywa. Warszawa, Bellona 2011, pp. 55 and 146.
7 Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereinafter AAN), Fund (f.) Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, Komitet Centralny (PZPR KC), Signature (Sign.) V/264, Minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party on 29 April 1985, Notatka informacyjna o Spotkaniu przywódców partii i państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego w Warszawie (26 April 1985).
absence of a major celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Warsaw Treaty,9 gave the new Kremlin master an opportunity to present his views on how the alliance had fared so far and how its future should look like. Gorbachev naturally appreciated the existence of the Warsaw Pact. Apart from standard statements to the effect that the position of socialism had been reinforced, or on the sovereignty and mutual friendship of member countries, he also stressed objective facts, e.g. the organization’s role in guaranteeing borders in Europe or in achieving military parity with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He emphasized that the efficiency of political and military mechanisms of the alliance had improved during the previous three decades, and also mentioned that he intended to continue in this trend.10

Gorbachev’s words may have reminded communist party leaders from the Eastern Bloc countries of well-worn phrases they had heard many times, given their vast experience with practices hitherto prevailing within the Warsaw Pact. It should be noted that appeals calling for stronger cooperation within the alliance had been voiced very often during the previous two decades. Nevertheless, they had been losing their concrete content ever since the 1970s, tending to be just mechanically repeated.11 Unlike his predecessors, the new Soviet energetic General Secretary presented his views and ideas in a clearer light. He partly intended to stick to age-old recipes: the focal point of political activities of the Warsaw Treaty Organization was to remain in Europe and the alliance was supposed to act in a coordinated manner, within well-established limits of the common foreign policy line. On the other hand, he showed willingness to look for new forms of cooperation as well. First and foremost, he stated he would welcome an initiative of any member state which would make the West to take a more “realistic” attitude towards the prevailing tension between the Cold War blocs. He also mentioned the need of informal meetings of communist party leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries, which would discuss topical issues in a flexible manner. However, these meetings, which were to be attended, in Gorbachev’s opinion, by representatives of other socialist countries, if necessary, were definitely not supposed to eclipse meetings of the Political Consultative Committee, which was the supreme body of the alliance.12

9 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin (hereinafter SAPMO-Barch), f. Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Protokolle der Sitzungen des Politbüros (DY 30/J IV 2/2), DY 30/J IV 2/2/2107, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 16 April 1985, Annex No. 14b to Minutes No. 15.


Reactions of leading representatives of the alliance’s member nations were initially lukewarm. After all, Gorbachev himself, when referring to the Warsaw meeting in his memoirs, says he had an impression that his partners from the other member states were not taking the act of prolonging the existence of the Warsaw Treaty Organization too seriously.\(^\text{13}\) General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Gustáv Husák and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov gave their ritual appreciation to the mention of improved consultation mechanisms. General Wojciech Jaruzelski, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, voiced his hope that the issue would be dealt with at the next meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, while General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Erich Honecker, traditionally emphasized coordination of the Warsaw Treaty Organization’s foreign policy.\(^\text{14}\) Of some greater significance was thus only the address of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania, Nicolae Ceauşescu.\(^\text{15}\) As a matter of fact, it presaged the departure from the obstructive attitude which Romania had basically assumed towards cooperation within the Warsaw Pact after 1964, albeit with some ups and downs. Acting rather unexpectedly, the Romanian leader admitted that the organization had proved useful during its existence and played a great role both in strengthening military capabilities of its members and in global events. He promised that Bucharest’s future policy would be closely coordinated with the allies, and also presented his own visions according to which the Warsaw Pact should focus on political issues, diplomacy and proposals of international initiatives rather than on military aspects. To this end, he advocated an early convention of the Political Consultative Committee. From then on, the agenda of the Political Consultative Committee was also to include socio-economic development of the Warsaw Pact member states and the body was supposed to be convened as often as necessary, but at least once a year. Ceauşescu also proposed the formation of expert teams and commissions of the alliance to deal with a broad spectrum of topical issues.\(^\text{16}\) It should be noted that the establishment of such teams (whose activities will be mentioned later) within the Warsaw Treaty Organization had been considered as early as in the first half of the 1970s. The measure was expected to


\(^{15}\) Ibid., Address of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Romania and President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu, 26 April 1985.

\(^{16}\) Ceauşescu proposed the formation of a consultation commission that would meet once a week or once in every 10 days and hold regular discussions with the Soviet delegation at the disarmament talks in Geneva. NATO used a similar mechanism. In addition, commissions assessing possibilities of ending the conflicts in the Middle East (e.g. the Iraq-Iran war) or economic issues, such as debts of developing countries, were to be formed as well.
strengthen multilateral cooperation among member states, but the mechanism had been activated only during the short rule of Yuri Andropov, who attempted to impart a fresh impetus to the stagnating alliance.\textsuperscript{17}

Not all Romanian proposals received support from other members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization – the so-called “Six.”\textsuperscript{18} Still, they represented a dramatic shift. The Czechoslovak delegation, for example, correctly noticed that Bucharest, although previously strictly rejecting the establishment of a permanent secretariat of the alliance, was now supporting the formation of commissions with similar powers; that it was supporting discussions on social developments in member states of the organization, although it had previously strictly opposed any intervention of the Warsaw Pact into internal affairs of its members; and that it was willing to accept the alliance as a platform of discussions on other than European issues, although previously promoting a limitation of the organization’s agenda to the old continent.\textsuperscript{19}

A preliminary analysis of sources confirms that Romania did not give up its specific approach to the Warsaw Treaty Organization in Gorbachev’s era, but its attitude was less confrontational and more conciliatory, at least in the alliance’s political structures. Romania’s obstructions therefore posed a much smaller problem for the “Six” in the second half of the 1980s. To some degree, one of the principal aspects that had been complicating the workings of the Warsaw Pact in Brezhnev’s times and during the short spells of his two successors was disappearing. The reasons an analysis of which would merit at least a separate study should be sought in an increasingly difficult situation and political isolation which Ceauşescu’s regime found itself bogged in. The fact that Moscow under Gorbachev’s leadership was willing – as we will also show later – to treat members of the Warsaw Pact much more as partners and was giving them more room for pursuing their own foreign policy interests also played a role.

The Soviet attitude was predominantly a result of developments of the Cold War. Since the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the East found itself on an increasing diplomatic and military defensive, which Kremlin intended to counter by a change of the existing course after Brezhnev’s demise. Most Soviet leaders did not want to continue the uncontrolled confrontation with the West and believed in a possible return to détente. Moreover, leaders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti – KGB), General Staff and military-industrial complex were increasingly aware that Soviet behaviour had obviously contributed to the failure of détente. Tendencies to restart interrupted talks with the United States and NATO had thus been appearing even before Chernenko’s death. After becoming the General Secretary, Gorbachev was visibly deepening

\textsuperscript{18} In the early 1970s, the “Six” had gradually become known as “the closely cooperating member states” of the Warsaw Treaty Organization.
them, intending to quickly achieve significant foreign policy successes. He was motivated by multiple reasons; speaking retroactively, he mentioned, in particular, the fact that the desperately needed internal reform of the Soviet system would have been impossible without a favourable international climate.20

Available sources nevertheless do not suggest that Gorbachev had a consistent concept of the future of the Warsaw Treaty Organization after becoming the leader of the Soviet Union. At least until mid-1986, he was probably just deepening trends which had been implemented in the alliance by his former mentor Andropov. The latter realized that a broader review of Soviet foreign policy would also have to involve changes of cooperation between Moscow and the Eastern Bloc countries, including a strengthening of political cooperation within the Warsaw Pact and more room for independent activities of its members. In addition, formal and informal meetings of the alliance at all levels were to be intensified.21 It is obvious that the Soviet leadership counted on the long-term existence of the Warsaw Treaty Organization even under Gorbachev. However, the core of its activities was to be political rather than military. As a matter of fact, other member countries were also supporting a higher level of politization of the alliance, seeing in it a chance to increase their influence on Soviet decisions.22 It is true that the communiqué of the Warsaw meeting reiterated the oft-repeated offer of a simultaneous dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, or, more accurately, of their military structures in the first phase.23 However, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, János Kádár, correctly reminded his colleagues that NATO had been consistently rejecting to consider this idea for a long time.24

An opening analysis of documentation of the Eastern Bloc countries shows that the Warsaw Treaty Organization, some of its public declarations25 and a rapidly changing international situation notwithstanding, did not count on the parallel dissolution of both alliances until 1990. Even when the end of the Cold War was

22 LUŇÁK, P. (ed.): Plánování nemyslitelného, p. 76.
24 Ibid., Report on the meeting of top-level state and Communist Party officials of members countries of the Warsaw Pact.
imminent, the East continued to view NATO and the Warsaw Pact as the two basic pillars of a potential new European security system.26

The Political Consultative Committee and Summit Meetings

In Gorbachev’s era, the Political Consultative Committee continued to be the supreme body of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. It was still dealing with a broad range of international policy and military issues; compared to Brezhнев’s times, however, its meetings were gradually taking on a different form. The first meeting of the supreme organ attended by the new Soviet General Secretary took place in Sofia on 22 and 23 October 1985. Even its preparations indicated that the young Soviet politician intended to make significant changes of the meeting format of the alliance’s supreme body, which had not been convened for almost three years.27 He kept assuring his opposite numbers from the Warsaw Pact member states in writing that they could raise any questions at the meetings. He also declared that he wanted to know their stance on current international issues as, in the opinion of the Soviet leadership, the difficult situation demanded truly collective consultations. However, the basically ceremonial Warsaw meeting, convened to extend the existence of the alliance, did not offer such an opportunity.28

A substantial part of the agenda of the Political Consultative Committee’s meeting in Sofia dealt with an improvement of operating mechanisms of the alliance. Gorbachev officially promised a “modernization” to the allies. To this end, a permanent political body and what was called the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information (whose workings will be analyzed later) of the Warsaw Treaty Organization were to be established. A resolution to hold regular meetings of the Political Consultative Committee was also adopted.29 Contrary to previous frequent attempts, the body was indeed successfully convened in approximately one-year intervals. Unlike in Brezhnev’s times, when clichés about the strengthening of political cooperation within the alliance tended to be vague and almost ritualized,

27 The meeting was to take place in January 1985, but ultimately did not because of the rapidly deteriorating health of Gorbachev’s predecessor Konstantin Chernenko (see BAEV, J.: The End of the Warsaw Pact, 1985–1991 [online]).
Gorbachev’s proposals looked concrete. Leaders of the other member countries of
the Warsaw Pact reacted positively to this change, but only in the routine and deep-
rooted manner of what they had been saying for years at meetings of the alliance.
The support of the Soviet proposals voiced by Honecker, Jaruzelski, or Husák thus
reflected not only their agreement, but also their loyalty towards Moscow. For
example, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party
of Czechoslovakia, echoing Gorbachev’s opinion, quickly admitted that coordination
of the alliance’s foreign policy did have some gaps and needed an improvement,
although the Czechoslovak “normalization” regime had been praising the workings
of the Warsaw Treaty Organization until then. Ceaușescu followed on from his
breakthrough Warsaw speech in Sofia, reiterating that it was necessary to strengthen
the role of the Political Consultative Committee and welcoming the intention to
convene it regularly at last.30 The reopening of the issue of a reform of political
structures of the Warsaw Pact was important, in particular, for the Polish leadership,
who saw the alliance as one of the means to overcome and break the international
isolation they had found themselves in after the brutal suppression of domestic
opposition in December 1981. In fact, the Politburo of the Central Committee of
the Polish United Workers’ Party immediately tasked the Polish Ministry of Foreign
Affairs to start working on its own concepts.31 In doing so, they followed on from
the policy of the leadership of Edward Gierek, which was one of the most active
advocates of changing working mechanisms of the Warsaw Treaty Organization.32

The meeting in Sofia brought some new elements into the workings of the Politi-
cal Consultative Committee. The role of the Joint Secretariat of the Warsaw Treaty
Organization was specified and modified. It is true the secretariat had worked
from 1977, but it had lacked any political influence and its activities had been lim-
ited to organizational work. Its core consisted of a group of Soviet clerks, security
officers and interpreters, which was dispatched to meetings of the alliance’s bodies.
Powers of representatives of the other member countries in the Joint Secretariat
were expanded at last, albeit slightly. The annual rotation in the position of its

30 NA, f. 1261/0/8, Vol. P141/85, Minutes of the 141st meeting of the Presidium of the Central
Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 29 October 1985, Item 1, Results
of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw
Pact in Sofia; SAPMO-BArch, f. Tagungen des Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Teil-
nehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages (DY 30/2352), Rede des Generalsekretärs des
ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker, auf der Tagung
des Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Staaten des Warschauer Vertrages in Sofia, 23
October 1985.
31 AAN, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/281, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central
Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, 24 October 1985, Notatka informacyjna
dotycząca narady Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszaw-
skiego w Sofii (22–23 października br.).
32 See JARZABEK, W.: PRL w politycznych strukturach Układu Warszawskiego w latach 1955–1980,
pp. 35–43; BÍLÝ, Matěj: Gierekovo vedení a prosazování polských zájmů v organizaci Varšavské
smlouvy [Gierek’s leadership and the promotion of Polish interests in the Warsaw Treaty Organi-
supreme representative – Secretary General of the alliance – was also confirmed. It was supposed to be held by a representative of the member country hosting the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in that year according to an alphabetic rotation system. The previously mentioned practice started in January 1983, following the illness and subsequent demise of Soviet diplomat Nikolay Firyubin, who had held the basically clerical post for years. Nevertheless, the role of the alliance’s Secretary General remained purely administrative. Documents issued by the Political Consultative Committee were to be kept from then on in the archives of the Polish People’s Republic, whose depositories had already held the founding deed of the Warsaw Pact dating back to 1955. There was also a joint press team which was supposed to help the host nations with preparations of press conferences after the meetings. These were unquestionably minor technical matters, but they did reflect Kremlin’s tendency to change cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization and adjust it to current requirements.

Gorbachev’s willingness to share essential information with the allies more openly, which was gradually, but constantly deepening in the political structure of the Warsaw Pact in the second half of the 1980s, was much more important. The proclaimed objective of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Sofia was – traditionally – the setting of a common course of member states on the international scene. Unlike Brezhnev, Gorbachev was serious about the

---

33 AAN, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/281, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, 24 October 1985, Notatka informacyjna dotycząca narady Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego w Sofii (22–23 października br.).

34 Memoirs of Firyubin’s first successor, Czechoslovak diplomat Dušan Spáčil, indicate that his work consisted mainly of sending documents and written information and dealing with administrative matters for the whole year he held the post. Moreover, Spáčil recalls that he, as the Secretary General of the alliance, was receiving substantial assistance from Soviet employees of the Secretariat when preparing and organizing political meetings. He was also assisted by Soviet diplomat Lev Mendelevich. (SPÁČIL, Dušan: My z Černína: Paměti československého diplomata [We from the Czernin Palace: Memoirs of a Czechoslovak diplomat]. Praha, Perískop 1995, p. 246.)


36 Initially, this approach had its clear limits, as shown by the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident in April 1986, which Moscow informed its allies about incompletely and late. On the other hand, the change of Moscow’s policy was reflected in the fact that the Communist Party and state leadership of the Soviet Union convened all Soviet ambassadors on 23 May to inform them about the events in Chernobyl. It was the first such meeting in the history of Soviet diplomacy. Gorbachev criticized the “inertia and old thinking” prevailing in the Soviet diplomatic corps which, in his opinion, did not keep pace with dynamic global developments. (NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P11/86, Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 17 June 1986, Item 1b, Report on the meeting of General and First Secretaries of Central Committees of Communist and Workers’ Parties of the Warsaw Pact Member States).
above cliché, giving representatives of the alliance’s member countries a detailed account on, for example, the development of the recently restored disarmament talks in Geneva, his meeting with French President François Mitterrand, and, in particular, the pending Soviet-US summit, the first one after 1979. He assured them that he would conduct talks with US President Ronald Reagan in the name and on behalf of the “whole socialist community.” He also indicated that the Warsaw Treaty Organization could subsequently comment on the meeting in a joint declaration and that the “most effective weapon” of socialist countries was unity. It was a return of sorts to practices prevailing in the first half of the 1970s, when the alliance had been successfully influencing talks about the preparation for the Helsinki Conference in a similar way. This approach was also reflected in the character of the Declaration of the Political Consultative Committee, which was a de facto statement of the alliance on the forthcoming Soviet-US negotiations. It unquestionably mirrored Moscow’s efforts to negotiate about an alleviation of the Cold War confrontation between the two blocs represented by their leading superpowers. European allies of the Soviets at that time accepted the concept without any objections; as a matter of fact, it received a lot of support from Prague and Warsaw. Moreover, the Declaration announced, for the first time in the Warsaw Pact’s history, that the member states intended to coordinate their future efforts in the field of socio-economic development, although this area fell exclusively into the purview of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). It was the first indication that Soviet leaders were looking for new fields of operation for the Warsaw Treaty Organization.

Immediately after the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Sofia, there was, for the first time, another unofficial working meeting of leading representatives of the alliance’s member states. This shows that the supreme body of the Warsaw Pact at the beginning of Gorbachev’s era was not a sufficient and adequate communication platform — its official protocol was still somewhat formalistic and the principal change occurred only in the preparation of final documents, with member states being given more room to voice their comments. At the closed meeting with his opposite numbers, Gorbachev stressed the necessity of holding regular consultations of communist party leaders. He intended to add

37 Ibid., f. 1261/0/8, Vol. P141/85, Minutes of the 141st meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 29 October 1985, Item 1, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Sofia.

38 Ibid., Declaration of the Political Consultative Committee of the member states of the Warsaw Pact for the elimination of the nuclear threat and for a positive turn of the situation in Europe and in the world, 23 October 1985.

39 Ibid., Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Sofia, 29 October 1985; AAN, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/281, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party held on 24 October 1985, Notatka informacyjna dot[ycząca] narady Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego w Sofii (22–23 października br.).
them to other unofficial meetings of communist party and state representatives of the Eastern Bloc countries, which had long been taking place on other occasions, e.g. during annual celebrations of the October Revolution in Moscow or during party congresses. He also abandoned his previous ideas of a possibility of inviting representatives of countries outside the alliance to them. The only issue left open was whether consultations should be directly tied to sessions of the Political Consultative Committee, or independently on official meetings of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, i.e. at the beginning of every year. In Gorbachev's opinion, the informal character of the meetings was to give the supreme representatives an opportunity to evaluate current problems in peace and to exchange opinions on the strategy of the Eastern Bloc countries. It was yet another signal to the allies that the new General Secretary of Soviet communists intended to strengthen multilateral cooperation. All the Warsaw Pact members supported the consultations. Gorbachev also emphasized that he was not after *pro forma* meetings, but after an open discussion which would not evade pressing issues concerning individual countries and their mutual relations. He also cautiously admitted that one of the key problems of the past was Moscow's failure to respect specific developments in different socialist countries – in other words, Kremlin's pressure and meddling in their internal affairs.  

It is possible that it was exactly this reason why Gorbachev preferred to hold discussions on some topics outside the official agenda of the Warsaw Pact meetings – a possibility of potential disagreements over sensitive issues of the workings of the Eastern Bloc paralyzing the whole alliance could not be ruled out, and the latter would thus have been unable to influence the development of relations between the East and the West. Needless to say, the new Soviet leadership intended to further deepen this function of the Warsaw Treaty, the roots of which dated back to Brezhnev's era. It was also reflected by the fact that, from 1986, final documents of the Political Consultative Committee were much more intensively promoted at the official level, being sent not only to the United Nations and the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, but also to the Secretary General of NATO, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the EEC, representatives of signatories of the New Delhi Declaration, Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The number of organizations which the documents were sent to was increasing throughout the second half

---


41 In 1985, Argentina, India, Mexico, Greece, Sweden and Tanzania issued a joint declaration in which they proclaimed their non-nuclear status and invited nuclear powers to stop tests, manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons. The next step was to be negotiations about a substantial reduction of their numbers.

42 *AAN*, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/309, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party held on 17 June 1986, Notatka informacyjna
of the 1980s. The distribution was always the responsibility of the host country of the Political Consultative Committee’s meeting.

The visions outlined by the Soviet General Secretary in Sofia were given a warm reception by the allies, in particular Romania. “It is necessary to draw a lesson,” was how Nicolae Ceaușescu, who not only supported more frequent meetings of supreme Communist Party representatives, but even proposed – and, looking back at Romania’s attitudes until then, quite unexpectedly – their institutionalization, commented on Gorbachev’s ideas. In his opinion, they did not have to be necessarily tied to meetings of the Political Consultative Committee but be more flexible. Erich Honecker assumed a similarly initiative attitude. He stated that it was necessary to hold discussions, including on day-to-day issues, also outside the framework of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. He therefore recommended regular meetings of ambassadors of “fraternal countries” in Moscow, which would produce information reports for leaders of each of the states. This proposal essentially defined activities of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information, which was established later. János Kádár, on the other hand, stressed the fact that the informal meetings of communist party tops would permit a more open debate and a presentation of ideas without having to adopt final resolutions and declarations.

The first meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Gorbachev’s era and the ensuing informal discussion was thus evaluated by the participants, from the viewpoint of “strengthening the unity and closeness,” as extraordinary. While these formulations might be reminiscent of the language of the past, they in fact reflected a much more flexible and less tied nature of the debates and a visibly more partner-like attitude of Soviet representatives. The trend to approach politi-

---

43 In April 1989, the declaration of the alliance’s Committee of Foreign Ministers was sent to the United Nations, Disarmament Conference in Geneva and its participating states, Secretary General of the United Nations, countries of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Secretary General of NATO, North Atlantic Council, European Economic Community, European Parliament, Presidium of the Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of American States, Organization of African Unity, League of Arab States, ASEAN, Chairman of the Socialist International, and leaders of the six non-nuclear countries (SAPMO-BArch, f. DY 30/J IV 2/2/2324, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 18 April 1989, Annex No. 5 to Minutes No. 16).

44 Ibid., f. DY 30/J IV 2/2/2222, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 2 June 1987, Annex No. 2 to Minutes No. 22; NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P74/88, Minutes of the 74th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 14 June 1988, Item 2, Sending of the Czechoslovak delegation to the regular meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact member states.


46 Ibid., Item 1, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Sofia.
It is necessary to draw a lesson

cal cooperation within the alliance from a new, more effective angle better suited for a rapid exchange of information – even outside the official framework – was soon confirmed by a short summit of Communist Party leaders, which Gorbachev convened in Prague on 21 November 1985. He gave his allies a briefing on his talks with US President Ronald Reagan in Geneva. Similar meetings later took place, for example, in East Berlin on 1 December 1987, or in Moscow on 4 December 1989, and they became one of the new flexible forms of cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization during Gorbachev’s era.

After Gorbachev’s advent, preparations of meetings of the Political Consultative Committee were much more systematic than in the 1970s. First and foremost, there were obvious efforts to avoid, unlike in the past, any “surprises” adversely affecting the meetings' efficiency. The host nation, responsible for the organization of the meeting, was thus dispatching special envoys to partner states to resolve unclear issues much more frequently than before. After the Budapest meeting of the Political Consultative Committee on 10 and 11 June 1986, the Secretary General of the alliance, acting upon Hungary’s proposal, started submitting reports on the fulfilment of set tasks as well. Although Romania, faithful to its specific approach to the alliance, attempted to block this practice, the “Six” introduced it, Bucharest’s opinion notwithstanding. In the years that followed, the General Secretary was handing over to each delegation a list of all the activities that had taken place in

47 NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P10/86, Minutes of the 10th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 2 June 1986, Report of the General Secretary of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact, Deputy Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of Hungary Comrade Miklós (sic) Barita on the fulfilment of tasks set at the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Sofia and concerning political cooperation within the Warsaw Pact (draft).


51 Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague (hereinafter AMZV), f. Documentation of Territorial Departments (DTD) 1953–1989, Inventory Number (Inv. No.) 23, Registration Number (Reg. No.) 1, Protocol of a meeting between Hungarian diplomat P. Benyo and Czechoslovak diplomat V. Poláček on 7 May 1986, 8 May 1986.

52 Romania presented a formal argument to the effect that there was no legal framework to support the practice (Ibid., Protocol of a meeting between Hungarian and Czechoslovak diplomats, 21 May 1986).
political structures of the Warsaw Pact since the last meeting. The practice of informal discussions of communist party tops after official meetings of the Political Consultative Committee continued; after 1986, they were supplemented by similar meetings of foreign ministers. These, together with ministers of defence, selected top-level party officials, and crowds of international policy experts, were a part of numerous delegations which member states were sending to summits of the alliance. From 1986, a more detailed timetable of meetings of political bodies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization was also being adopted to improve the operation of its mechanisms.

Looking back, former Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak, who attended many meetings of the alliance, believed the optimism spread by the new Soviet leadership, in particular the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union himself, was a significant factor of the change of atmosphere in political organs of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. At the abovementioned meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Budapest in June 1986, Gorbachev stated that political cooperation within the Warsaw Pact was advancing to a brand new level, emphasizing that the changes were by no means over. For the first time ever, he made a comparison of sorts between developments in the organization and his domestic reform programme known as the perestroika. He also appreciated recent more independent activities of some member states in the international arena, e.g. in the matter of establishing zones free of nuclear and chemical weapons or the convention of a scientific and technological forum. At an informal meeting with the party leaders, he commended both the new forms of cooperation and the meeting as such. He thought fit to repeat that not all initiatives must come from Moscow, urging the allies to submit and present their own;

54 Ibid., Vol. P11/86, Minutes of the 11th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 17 June 1986, Item 1a, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Budapest.
55 In 1985, the delegation of the German Democratic Republic included nine of them (SAP-MO-BArch, f. DY 30/3 IV 2/2/2107, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 16 April 1985, Annex No. 14b to Minutes No. 15.
only the subsequent process was to be coordinated.\textsuperscript{59} The message was a \textit{de facto} continuation of the supreme Soviet representative’s address to the 27\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1986, in which Gorbachev spoke about the unity of the Warsaw Pact, but also emphasized that unity did not mean conformity. He thus granted member states the right to participate in the formation of the alliance’s future.\textsuperscript{60} The fact that declarations of the Warsaw Treaty Organization at that time started using the term \textit{allied states} thus had its reason.\textsuperscript{61}

The abovementioned tendencies to look for new agendas for the Warsaw Treaty Organization resulted in a very significant shift. Economic rather than military cooperation within the alliance was accentuated even at the Budapest meeting of the Political Consultative Committee. In this respect, Ceaușescu’s opinion to the effect that issues of economic cooperation and the “road to communism” should be discussed particularly at informal meetings of Communist Party leaders was symptomatic.\textsuperscript{62} During the informal meeting, Gorbachev invited his opposite numbers to Moscow, where they were expected to present, in the second half of 1986, their own opinions on future integration of economic and scientific-technical cooperation and a potential reform of the CMEA. It is important to note that the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union preferred such matters to be discussed only with the Warsaw Pact allies (although not necessarily in connection with meetings of the Political Consultative Committee) rather than within the broader scope of CMEA members. Motivations and intentions of Moscow and its allies in this respect need a more detailed examination in the future. In the second half of the 1980s, however, there were obvious efforts to bring some of the economic agenda that should have normally fallen into the purview of the CMEA to meetings of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. As a matter of fact, Gorbachev informed the allies also about preparations and goals of the forthcoming plenary session of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on the next five-year plan in Budapest; he intended to address the session with a keynote speech on the \textit{perestroika}.\textsuperscript{63} The fact that a Soviet General Secretary spoke about planned domestic measures at an official Warsaw Pact meeting was unprecedented in the organization’s history.

In mid-1986, Gorbachev’s attitude towards cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization started taking up concrete contours, which practically did not change much until 1989. The Soviet statesman was undoubtedly attaching a lot of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, Item 1b, Report on the meeting of General and First Secretaries of Central Committees of Communist and Workers’ Parties of the Warsaw Pact Member States.
\item \textsuperscript{60} MASTNÝ, V. – BYRNE, M. (ed.): \textit{A Cardboard Castle?}, p. 60.
\item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{NA}, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P11/86, Minutes of the 11\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 17 June 1986, Item 1a, Appeal the Warsaw Pact Member States to NATO member states and all European countries, 11 June 1986.
\item \textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact Member States in Budapest.
\item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, Item 1b, Report on the meeting of General and First Secretaries of Central Committees of Communist and Workers’ Parties of the Warsaw Pact Member States.
\end{itemize}
importance to relations between Moscow and other socialist countries and he felt, in the light of challenges voiced at the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), it was necessary to define their parameters in greater detail. He did so by a memorandum which he submitted to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in June 1986, shortly after the Budapest meeting of the Political Consultative Committee. The meeting in Hungary’s capital confirmed his opinion that a broad discussion had to be initiated among the alliance’s members. In his memorandum, Gorbachev appreciated that socialist countries had created organizations such as the Warsaw Pact or the CMEA in the past, as they had strengthened their international position by doing so. At the same time, he pointed out that the development in member states had slowed down, although the increasingly faster scientific and technological progress should have stimulated it. As a result of the above, the Soviet General Secretary was afraid that the influence of socialism in the international arena would significantly drop. He saw the cause in a discrepancy between real needs of the time and the nature of relations among socialist countries, which had been formed after the end of the Second World War. He believed the extensive material assistance which the Soviet Union had been providing to countries of the nascent Eastern Bloc after 1945 had been justified, as the Soviet Union had had the greatest experience with the building of a socialist system. As each of the countries had been growing stronger, the approach outlined above – “spoon-feeding” in Gorbachev’s words – was making less and less sense. The Soviet representative stated that mutual relations among socialist countries had not been built on principles of frankness, openness and trust in the past, a fact that should have been known to many of his politburo colleagues; many multilateral meetings were just demonstrative and formalistic. In Gorbachev’s opinion, the prevailing international situation necessitated profoundly different forms of cooperation, ones that would also take into account ongoing personal changes in some socialist countries. The Soviet General Secretary criticized the fact that Moscow was perceived as a conservative, domineering and anti-reform force and, as a result, its allies were afraid to bring any changes into the established functioning of the socialist system. He attached particular importance to the removal of all obstacles hampering cooperation of socialist countries, as he viewed improved mutual collaboration as an opportunity for strengthening socialism on a global scale. In his memorandum, Gorbachev reminded that the author and initiator of all international initiatives which socialist countries had hitherto presented as collective efforts was in fact Moscow; the allies were only providing support to them. In Gorbachev’s opinion, the situation ultimately prompted some Eastern Bloc states to take separate steps to fulfil their national ambitions. The potential for implementing a coordinated foreign policy thus remained unexploited. The Soviet General Secretary did not explicitly mention the Warsaw Treaty Organization, but the context indicates that he was referring to or hinting at its functioning. In his view, the content of meetings of the alliance was to be much more concrete. In his memorandum, Gorbachev stated that a general reassessment of relations among socialist countries was a priority of Soviet policy and referred to hitherto
very positive reactions of the Warsaw Pact member states to initial steps in that direction. The above conclusions were also explicitly supported by Soviet Prime Minister Nikolay Ryzhkov, who declared at the party politburo meeting that Moscow had to completely change the style and forms of collaboration with its allies.

Gorbachev assured the Politburo that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union naturally did not waive its responsibility for the global fate of socialism by doing so. For objective reasons, the Soviet Union expected to retain its leading role in the socialist movement and the position of the guarantor of security of its allies. However, it was expected to use incentives and appeals rather than directives in the future, and to create prerequisites for real collaboration. The primary objective of the perestroika in relation to socialist countries was to be a consolidation of their unity. Centrifugal tendencies were to be prevented by more efficient economic, scientific and technological cooperation. Naturally, this goal also required extensive changes in the workings of the CMEA, which was expected to follow a direction similar to that pursued by the EEC. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was also to learn from experience of its allies in this process. The collective experience, which was a term coined by Gorbachev for a higher level of respect towards socialist countries, was expected to ultimately increase the authority of Moscow. Soviet stimulation of foreign policy cooperation of member states of the Warsaw Pact was supposed to strictly abide by principles of equality and voluntariness. Kremlin was to take into account opinions and interests of its partners and to give them more leeway (and not just formally) for their own foreign policy activities. In doing so, Gorbachev took care so that principles of the memorandum, which basically summarized and further elaborated his approach to the Warsaw Treaty Organization until then, did not remain only on paper. Urged by the appeal of the General Secretary, the Soviet Politburo was thus supposed to task relevant departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KGB to prepare specific documents for the implementation of the perestroika principles in relations with socialist countries.

In spite of the tendencies outlined above, the Soviet Union was still keeping its key position in political structures of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. It stemmed

---


65 Library of Congress, Collection (c.) Dmitrii Antonovich Volkogonov Papers, reel 17, Zasedanie politbyuro CK KPSS 26 iyunja 1986 goda.

from its superpower status due to which a truly equal partnership in every respect was hardly thinkable. For example, East German documents indicate that Moscow was still setting the exact date of meetings of the Political Consultative Committee.67

Due to the busy schedule of the Soviet General Secretary, it was an understandable approach; however, unlike in the previous era, the Soviets did not abuse it to stifle cooperation within the alliance. Although Gorbachev kept promoting the loosest possible agenda, with as few preset items as possible, for meetings of the supreme body of the Warsaw Pact even after 1986, the agenda was still approved by Kremlin and the host nation’s leadership only acknowledged Kremlin’s proposals.68 Still, meetings of the Political Consultative Committee under Gorbachev were fulfilling a more practical and less ceremonial role than before 1985. The perception of East European countries by Moscow was changing as well – they could hardly be referred to as mere satellites in the second half of the 1980s. Mutual relations were increasingly taking on a partnership form, which was also reflected in day-to-day workings of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Although certain tendencies to this effect had been appearing even soon after Brezhnev’s demise, it is possible to concur, together with historian Vojtech Mastny, that this Soviet attitude developed in full only during Gorbachev’s era.69

During the Warsaw meeting of the Political Consultative Committee on 15 and 16 July 1988, Gorbachev declared that meetings of the alliance’s supreme body were indeed characterized by a “true comradely openness,” a democratic exchange of opinions, and improved coordination in every respect.70 The Kremlin ruler was basically right, but the pace of changes in the work of political structures of the Warsaw Pact started lagging behind enormously dynamic international developments towards the end of the Cold War. The truth is that Soviet leaders were aware of it. As a matter of fact, conclusions of the 19th Programme Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in June 1988 planned a profound transformation of links between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries within the alliance. The Political Consultative Committee was to become a purely


consultative body and be separated from reformed military structures of the Warsaw Pact. Gorbachev officially presented these visions to the allies at the meeting of the supreme body of the alliance held in Bucharest on 7 and 8 July 1989. He passed on an opinion of the Soviet Politburo to the effect that the Warsaw Treaty Organization, reacting to international changes, should undergo a general reform and complete its transformation from a military-political alliance to a political-military one. The Soviet General Secretary praised the benefits which the Warsaw Pact had brought so far and expressed his belief that it would serve its members well also in the new international situation. However, this fundamental political transformation of the alliance was encountering a lot of problems, the biggest one being the starting fragmentation of the “Six” which was losing its former unity due to international policy changes, domestic changes in the Eastern Bloc countries, and looser control of Moscow. It was not just Romania, but also increasingly reform-oriented Poland and Hungary, which pursued, first and foremost, their own interests within the alliance.

The Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs

The Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs continued to play a very important role in political structures of the Warsaw Pact even after 1985. However, it was different from that it had played during Brezhnev’s era, when it had been the only truly functioning high-level political body of the alliance, as the Political Consultative Committee had not been meeting at that time. In Gorbachev’s era, the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs was convened twice a year, every spring and autumn; after 1989, there were joint meetings of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Committee of Defense Ministers held on the eve of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, which reflected the efforts aimed at a higher politicization of the Warsaw Treaty Organization at the expense of the alliance’s military dimension. Nevertheless, the first meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs under Gorbachev took place only after the fundamental change of the leader of the Soviet diplomacy. On 28 July 1985, long-standing Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze nominated by Gorbachev. It was a surprising move. In terms of character traits, the new minister was the exact opposite of his predecessor. Moreover, he lacked any international political experience, having

---

73 NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P124/89, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 12 July 1989, Item 1, Report on the course and results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact member states.
spent his entire previous career in Georgia. However, no one among the Soviet leaders dared oppose Gorbachev's intentions, a situation that was typical at that time. Gorbachev's decision indicated that the General Secretary intended to make dramatic changes in Soviet foreign policy and that he himself would take the reins. He chose Shevardnadze chiefly because of a strong trust which he had had in him since the 1970s. Due to the new minister's inexperience, Gromyko continued to set an important tone in Soviet foreign policy, but this ended in early 1986, when the duo of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, assisted by loyal collaborators, took hold of the monopoly to formulate the Soviet foreign policy.74

These developments were also reflected in the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The first meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs which Shevardnadze attended took place in Warsaw on 19 and 20 March 1986. Compared to the previous meetings, its atmosphere was radically changed. Proof positive of that was the inclusion of the previously tabooized topic of the Soviet situation in Afghanistan in the meeting's agenda. Shevardnadze delivered a speech criticizing the work of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, but he identified himself with Gorbachev's opinion that political cooperation of the alliance's member states had advanced to a much better and flexible level in the previous year. He expected future meetings to be less formalistic and with "more direct comradely contacts."

The Soviet minister anticipated that the increase of the political role of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which had been going on since Yuri Andropov's coming to power, would grow even stronger in the coming years. In his concept, the alliance was to continue generating major peace initiatives, but also was to become an important information exchange platform at multiple levels. Although the Soviet Union understandably did not share all details with its allies, Shevardnadze (just like Gorbachev) started informing them at length on principal objectives and problems of the Soviet Union's foreign and security policy. There were not to be any future "surprises," such as the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba or military intervention in Afghanistan, for the allies. Shevardnadze was also calling for and stimulating a more open debate and a true exchange of opinions on issues that the committee was to deal with. To this end, foreign ministers started a practice of closed-door meetings within the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Between 1986 and 1989, their consultations usually took place both before and after the principal meeting attended by full delegations.75

The changes in the procedures of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which were supported by Soviet allies, were related to a shift of the political function of the Warsaw Pact which Kremlin intended to implement. Before 1985, the organization had been used predominantly as a tool of formulating collective

75 See LOCHER, A.: Shaping the Policies of the Alliance [online].
foreign policy of the Eastern Bloc countries and of issuing collective declarations on international developments, both of which represented mainly Moscow’s attitudes, minor concessions to smaller states notwithstanding. From then on, views of Soviet allies were to be taken more into account. The concept necessarily required a better sharing of information needed to consider further steps carefully. Acting along these lines, Shevardnadze informed the allies even about a highly internal matter, namely an intended restructuring of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which was to include a new Directorate for Military-Political Issues, a significant step also important for the Warsaw Treaty), during the abovementioned meeting in Warsaw. Shevardnadze invited each of the states represented at the meeting to specify the type of information they were primarily interested in so that they could receive it from the Soviets at first hand, e.g. through their embassies in Moscow. As a matter of fact, ambassadors were supposed to play an important role in future better political cooperation of the alliance’s members.76

It does not mean that Moscow was using the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs only to share information with its allies from 1986. The committee continued to be a platform through which the Warsaw Pact member states proclaimed their support to the Soviet line in talks between the two superpowers. It was no accident that its November 1987 meeting had been convened right before Eduard Shevardnadze travelled to Washington for important disarmament talks.77 The East German leadership admitted that the main purpose of the meeting was to proclaim support to the Soviet minister.78

The Warsaw meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March 1986 also brought an important discussion on how documents issued in the name of the alliance should look like. There was a basic consensus that they would not have to be too extensive. They were to focus on topical and new international policy phenomena, not just to keep repeating general or well-known positions of the East. Only Romania opposed the intention. However, its approach was not purely obstructive – it was motivated rather by efforts aimed at continuing resonations of hitherto unheeded Romanian initiatives.79 The approach of the “Six,” which,

77 Ibid., Vol. P49/87, Minutes of the 49th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 11 November 1987, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Prague, 28 and 29 October 1987.
78 SAPMO-BArch, f. DY 30/J IV 2/2/2246, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 3 November 1987, Annex No. 3 to Minutes No. 44.
apart from Moscow, was promoted mainly by Budapest, ultimately prevailed.\textsuperscript{80} As a matter of fact, the regular and significantly higher frequency of meetings of the alliance in Gorbachev’s era made continuous repeating of words already said meaningless. The change in meetings of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is also indicated by the fact that the declaration of the Warsaw meeting was finalized only after presentations of all delegations, which showed an unusually high initiative. Moscow appreciated their approach through Shevardnadze’s mouth, and was also pleased with the improving coordination of foreign policy activities of allied countries acting through foreign ministries and diplomatic missions, which was manifested, for example, in the presentation of the Czechoslovak-East German initiative aimed at the Federal Republic of Germany and proposing a zone without chemical warfare weapons.\textsuperscript{81} Member states concurred that the gist of the expanded consultations should not be limited only to regular periodical meetings of Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, but also be complemented by informal and flexible \textit{ad hoc} talks.\textsuperscript{82}

The fact that Moscow assigned so much importance, just like in the case of the Political Consultative Committee, to making meetings of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs less formalistic and less rigid, tells a lot about the nature of political cooperation within the Warsaw Pact until then. A mere reinforcing of multilateral elements through a more collective drafting of document or establishing various commissions and working groups simply was not enough. Gorbachev’s leadership thus had to change the very character and purpose of meetings of the alliance. In Warsaw, Eduard Shevardnadze therefore spoke against the existing practice of putting some problems on a backburner or intentionally hushing them.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. P49/87, Minutes of the 49\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 11 November 1987, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Prague, 28 and 29 October 1987; \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. P91/88, Minutes of the 91\textsuperscript{st} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 2 November 1988, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Budapest, 28 and 29 October 1988.

\textsuperscript{81} The initiative initially stemmed from talks between the East German SED and the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD). It also significantly reflected encouragements of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. After consultations with the Soviet party, the proposal was ultimately submitted jointly by the governments of the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia. The Warsaw Treaty Organization, however, formally supported their initiative. (\textit{SAPMO-BArch}, f. DY 30/J IV 2/2/2124, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 6 August 1985, Annex No. 3 to Minutes No. 31; \textit{NA}, f. 1261/0/8, Vol. P141/85, Minutes of the 141\textsuperscript{st} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 29 October 1985, Item 1, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Sofia.)

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{NA}, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P3/86, Minutes of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 10 April 1986, Item 3, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Warsaw, 19 and 20 March 1986.
up. The fact that political mechanisms of the Warsaw Treaty Organization had hitherto worked not just irregularly, but largely also in a formalistic manner, was also admitted by Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Bohuslav Chňoupek during the unofficial part of the talks in the Polish capital. According to the abovementioned testimony of Polish diplomatic Jerzy Nowak, the change of atmosphere in the political structure of the alliance was also initiated by Shevardnadze’s instructions to Soviet diplomats, which ordered them to apply a partnership approach to representatives of the other member states.

The changes in the operation of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Gorbachev’s era were reflected in its flexibility. In October 1986, for example, the committee met in Bucharest two days before its scheduled date, because the Soviet leadership wanted to inform its allies about the forthcoming talks between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik as fast as possible. Shevardnadze characteristically notified his counterparts of the talks at a meeting of a narrow circle of foreign ministers rather than at the plenary session of whole delegations. Changes in the latter body were also urged directly by the Soviet General Secretary. When receiving participants of the Moscow meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March 1987, for example, he unprecedentedly asked the foreign ministers to share with him, one by one, their opinions on activities of this organ of the alliance. The later generally appreciated the new, more democratic atmosphere and openness in presenting issues and looking for ways to resolve them. At a later meeting of the Soviet Politburo, Gorbachev acknowledged with pleasure that practically all the ministers had communicated their own opinions and attempted to participate in formulating a joint line of the alliance. He believed that such a situation would permit early discussions of pressing problems and also enable focusing on the mechanism of consultations.

83 Ibid.
85 Gorbachev initially intended to inform Communist Party representatives of the Eastern Bloc countries of his meeting with Reagan at a November meeting in Moscow, which was to be dedicated to economic issues. However, the Soviet leadership ultimately decided to notify its allies at the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers, while the Communist Party leaders were supposed to discuss the matter later and in greater depth. It was an indication of Kremlin’s willingness to discuss the same issues with its allies repeatedly, more frequently, and at different levels.
Some long-established reflexes, however, were taking a long time to disappear. One must bear in mind that political meetings of the Warsaw Pact were still attended by officials whose attitudes had been formed during Brezhnev’s era. The substance of the changes initiated by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze was largely escaping them. During official meetings of the committee, some foreign ministers, namely those of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, felt a need to return to recent plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in their speeches and to pathetically adulate their influence on foreign policy, or to make assurances of support of their respective countries. In this respect, the words of Bohuslav Chňoupek are characteristic: “Perestroika and glasnost have become a part of the global lexicon, along with terms like peace, razryadka (dé- tente) or sputnik.” Let us add that some speeches of Gorbachev’s counterparts during informal meetings of the Political Consultative Committee in Gorbachev’s era were also characterized by a demonstrative agreement and repetition of statements previously voiced in the official part of the meeting. Still, in mid-1987 the Soviet General Secretary could justly speak about an appreciable improvement of the work of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Following the example of supreme Communist Party representatives, foreign ministers of member states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization also started a practice of extraordinary meetings. It was a direct consequence of Gorbachev’s efforts to inform Soviet allies about talks of representatives of the superpowers in a detailed and open manner. The first such meeting took place on 23 February 1988, in Prague. The speed it was convened with illustrated a significant improvement of the ability to act on the part of political structures of the Warsaw Pact, which were becoming a truly important information forum in the second half of the 1980s. Member states were inspired by functional mechanisms of NATO in this respect. The main item on the agenda was Eduard Shevardnadze’s briefing on the February visit of US Foreign Secretary George Schultz in Moscow. The Soviet minister gave a detailed account of US opinions concerning the international situation to his counterparts. At the same time, there was also a meeting of the North Atlantic

88 NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P32/87, Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 30 March 1987, Item 1, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Moscow, 24 and 25 March 1987.
91 Ibid., Vol. P37/87, Minutes of the 37th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 1 June 1987, Item 1, Report on the course and results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member countries of the Warsaw Pact in Berlin.
Council where Schultz informed US allies about the Soviet position.\textsuperscript{92} The format proved unquestionably successful for the Warsaw Pact, as corroborated by the fact that the Soviets convened a similar meeting in Berlin only two months later. The agenda included not only an immediate analysis of another meeting between Shevardnadze and Schultz in Geneva; Mikhail Gorbachev believed it was important to have consultations within the Warsaw Treaty Organization also before his talks with Ronald Reagan in Moscow. A characteristic feature of the meeting was openness with which the leader of Soviet diplomacy answered questions of his partners.\textsuperscript{93}

The approach described above matched the vision of future cooperation of the Warsaw Pact foreign ministers outlined by Shevardnadze at the March 1988 regular meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Sofia. At that time, the Soviets believed the committee had succeeded in eradicating remnants of the often mentioned formalism and in transforming itself into an effective tool for formulating a truly collective policy of the alliance.\textsuperscript{94} A similar conviction prevailed among Soviet allies as well; it was voiced, for example, by East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer.\textsuperscript{95} The Soviet leaders therefore decided to modify the agenda of the committee; its future meetings were not to deal with routine matters which could be handled by numerous expert groups then operating within the Warsaw Treaty Organization, but instead focus on discussing truly important issues, in particular about the progress of the \textit{perestroika} and its versions in each member state. It was yet another attempt to change the scope of authority of the Warsaw Pact – in Brezhnev’s era, particularly from 1968, Moscow had not wanted to discuss internal affairs of member states at official meetings of the alliance at all. Shevardnadze realized that Eastern Bloc diplomats generally did not discuss urgent domestic problems on official occasions. This was why he called again for a strengthening of informal contacts of foreign ministers, which he hoped would facilitate discussions on socio-economic reforms in individual member states.\textsuperscript{96} It was perhaps a reflec-

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., Vol. P61/88, Minutes of the 61\textsuperscript{st} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 25 February 1988, Item 7, Information about the meeting of foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Prague, 23 February 1988.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., P71/88, Minutes of the 71\textsuperscript{st} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 17 May 1988, Item 3, Information about the meeting of foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Berlin.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., Vol. P65/88, Minutes of the 65\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 31 March 1988, Item 4, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Sofia.


\textsuperscript{96} NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P65/88, Minutes of the 65\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 31 March 1988, Item 4, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Sofia.
tion of his conviction that there was a lot of sympathy and understanding among members of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.97

Moscow was thus interested in maintaining a free multilateral discussion about the perestroika with the Eastern Bloc countries and it intended, to this end, to make use of the changed mechanisms of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which allowed less rigid and formal meetings in the second half of the 1980s. Acting along these lines, Shevardnadze also invited his opposite numbers, at the October 1988 meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Budapest, to come to the Soviet Union at the turn of spring and summer next year, where they were supposed to informally discuss perspectives of international developments and cooperation within the Warsaw Pact for a few days.98

Shevardnadze was drawing inspiration in the West, more specifically from meetings of foreign ministers of the EEC. At the Bucharest meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in July 1989, he reminded his partners that their EEC counterparts were meeting almost every week and that they were not discussing only political or military matters, but also economic ones. The Warsaw Treaty Organization was to draw an appropriate conclusion from it. On the eve of the collapse of communist power in Eastern Europe, however, Soviet plans were encountering the abovementioned fragmentation of opinions of the alliance’s members, which reflected mainly their different attitudes to the reform of the state socialist system and pursued international objectives. Moscow’s efforts to discuss economic issues on the platform of the Warsaw Pact were supported, for example, by Romania’s Foreign Minister Ioan Totu, who argued that foreign ministers of NATO member states also discussed similar matters. However, his Hungarian colleague Gyula Horn opposed him. The reform-oriented Hungarian leadership, which had already started a visible weakening of the country’s links to the Warsaw Treaty Organization, demanded that the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs should deal only with economic issues directly related to foreign policy and not interfere with the authority of the CMEA. The change in Budapest’s attitude was well illustrated by a requirement not to adopt collective communiqués – from then on, member states were to have possibility to express their own views, which might be different from those of the alliance.99 A previously unthinkable situation thus occurred: Hungary, for a long

97 NSA, c. REEADD, box 28, R13121, Records of A. Chernyaev from the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held on 31 March 1988.


99 Ibid., Vol. P124/89, Minutes of the 124th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 12 July 1989, Item 1, Report on the course and results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact member states.
time one of the most loyal members of the alliance, opposed Soviet plans, while Romania, a long-time rebel, supported them.

Moscow did not want to give up its plans, but it was not pushing them through as assertively as before 1985. At the November 1989 meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, Shevardnadze decided to set an example, delivering an extensive briefing on the progress of the perestroika in the Soviet Union. The obvious effort of the Soviet Union and some other countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Romania, to discuss mutual economic cooperation on the platform of the Warsaw Treaty was illustrated by the fact that, for the first time in the alliance’s history, ministers of foreign trade were also invited to the meeting.

In Gorbachev’s era, the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs also became one of the key forums for debates concerning a potential deeper institutional reform of political structures of the Warsaw Pact. The discussions generally took place in a narrow informal circle of foreign ministers, not during meetings of complete delegations. The improvement of mechanisms of cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization remained, in fact, a continuous item in agendas of the committee’s meetings until the disintegration of the alliance. It is possible to agree with historian Anna Locher that one of the reasons why this debate was not moving forward very much was that leaderships of member states were not issuing any constructive instructions – at least until April 1989.

Meetings of Deputy Foreign Ministers and Expert Groups

Political cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization was also taking place at lower levels even after 1985. It was actually this platform where important compromises were often achieved and supporting documents for summits of the alliance prepared. The intention to hold meetings of deputy foreign ministers

100 Ibid., Vol. P137/89, Minutes of the 137th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 2 November 1989, Item 6, Report on the course and results of the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Warsaw.

101 Ibid., Vol. P135/89, Minutes of the 135th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 19 October 1989, Item 15, Notification of a meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states.

102 Ibid., Vol. P32/87, Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 30 March 1987, Item 1, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states held in Moscow on 24 and 25 March 1987; Ibid., Vol. P108/89, Minutes of the 108th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 16 March 1989, Item 13, Notification of a meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states.

103 LOCHER, A.: Shaping the Policies of the Alliance [online].

104 Drafts of statements of the alliance were generally – but no longer exclusively – prepared by the Soviets who submitted them to other states for comments and evaluation. The next
and expert groups was confirmed as early as at the October 1985 meeting of the Political Consultative Committee. Let us remind ourselves that meetings of deputy foreign ministers had already played an important role in the alliance's mechanisms before; in the 1970s, they even substituted the non-existent permanent secretariat. The exact number of meetings of deputy foreign ministers in Gorbachev's era is difficult to determine. Unlike higher level meetings, such as those of the Political Consultative Committee and the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, they were not automatically publicized. At the same time, we cannot be sure that minutes or records of all such meetings have been preserved. According to historian Csába Békés, however, the frequency of the meetings of deputy foreign ministers culminated in 1986 – there were eight of them. The publication of such information in the media probably depended on the agenda of a given meeting, or on its propagandistic potential. The meetings of deputy foreign ministers continued to take place ad hoc; appeals calling for holding them regularly, on precisely set dates, remained unheeded, just like in the past, the meetings' allegedly high benefits notwithstanding. The meetings were not initiated only by Moscow; other countries were also submitting proposals to this effect. As a rule, the meeting took place in the capital of the state which had convened it.

---

stage consisted in a collective discussion of the documents by expert groups or at the level of deputy foreign ministers. The procedure was typically used for Warsaw Pact statements addressed to the North Atlantic Council. (NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P115/89, Minutes of the 115th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 3 May 1989, Item 6, Information on an appeal of the Warsaw Pact members states to NATO member states.)

---

105 AAN, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/281, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party held on 24 October 1985, Notatka informacyjna dot. narady Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego w Sofi i (22–23 października br.).


108 SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2147, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 17 December 1985, Annex No. 6 to Minutes No. 52.

109 Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMZV), F. Meetings of the Collegium (PK 1953–1989), Ministerial Collegium No. 258, Meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact members states on issues of the Non-Aligned Movement and other matters concerning Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, 10 February 1986.

110 In 1986, for example, the German Democratic Republic initiated a meeting to discuss the current approach of the Warsaw Pact to the Non-Aligned Movement and non-European matters, Poland proposed consultations before the Vienna meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, while the Soviet Union convened a meeting on the continuation of the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1987 (Ibid.; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2159, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 25 March 1986, Annex No. 8 to Minutes No. 12; Ibid., DY 30 J IV 2/2/2189, Minutes
The thematically narrowly focused consultations of deputy foreign ministers were, in a way, a parallel to meetings of an ever-increasing number of expert groups. In October 1986, Eduard Shevardnadze emphasized the necessity of closer cooperation along both of the abovementioned lines and of expanding the agenda of such meetings. Next year, deputy foreign ministers were to discuss, for example, the Vienna meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Middle East, the Geneva Disarmament Conference, policy towards the Non-Aligned Movement, human rights and humanitarian matters, the Vienna disarmament talks, or developments in the Pacific. Deputy foreign ministers met again to assess the progress of efforts aimed at reducing levels of forces and conventional weapons in Europe, creating a collective international security system, and formulating a policy of the Warsaw Pact towards Nordic countries. As the organization's agenda was expanding, its members agreed that the approach to independent and developing countries should also be coordinated at the level of deputy foreign ministers. In contrast to late Brezhnev's era, however, Kremlin was not attempting to discuss non-European issues under the aegis of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and in the presence of representatives of Soviet non-European allies; Soviet diplomats were analyzing the situation with them separately. In the second half of the 1980s diplomats from these countries were invited to the Warsaw Pact’s meetings of deputy...
foreign ministers only rarely, i.e. when the agenda to be discussed directly concerned them. Moscow was attempting to shift negotiations involving a broader circle of socialist countries to a different level, e.g. that of intensified meetings of secretaries of central committees of ruling parties responsible for specific areas, in particular ideology and international matters. These were expected to complement the general strengthening of political contacts within the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which definitely was not the only information channel of the Eastern Bloc countries.

Compared to the 1970s, however, the importance of the meetings of deputy foreign ministers was diminishing in Gorbachev’s era. The reasons included an overall improvement of high-level political cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty and also operation of newly established expert groups and commissions the principal missions of which were very similar – a collective preparation of documents and statements which the Warsaw Treaty subsequently presented as collective works. In contrast to deputy foreign ministers, the expert groups had periodical meetings. The decision to create these new expert groups was adopted already during the first meeting of the Political Consultative Committee under Gorbachev, in October 1985. Let us add that the Soviets started respecting proposals of its allies even in this respect. After all, expert groups were generally meeting in the capital of the country that had proposed their formation. Romania in particular was very active in this respect, intending to discuss most of its initiatives in the Warsaw Treaty exactly in this format. The establishment of each expert group had to be approved


119 AAN, f. PZPR KC, Sign. V/281, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, 24 October 1985, Notatka informacyjna dotyczaca narady Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego partyw-stron Ukladu Warszawskiego w Sofi (22–23 października br.).

120 At the October 1985 meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, the Romanians proposed to create expert groups for matters concerning the freezing and reduction of military expenditures and armed forces of Warsaw Pact member states and possibilities of overcoming the backwardness of developing countries, respectively. These proposals were subsequently assessed by the Committee of Foreign Ministers. (NA, f. 1261/0/8, Vol. P141/85, Minutes of the 141st meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 29 October 1985, Item 1, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact member states in Sofia.
not only by the Political Consultative Committee, but also by the Committee of
Ministers of Foreign Affairs.\textsuperscript{121}

Meetings of the expert groups were conducted in a confidential mode, and initially
no public information about them was released. Their existence was revealed as
late as on 1 May 1987, by Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Várkonyi in an inter-
view for the \textit{Népszabadság} daily. He also made a general statement to the effect
that, compared to the past, political bodies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization
were meeting more frequently and that there was a higher level of openness and
information exchange in the alliance, which he attributed to an improving quality
of the Warsaw Pact’s initiatives in which all member states had participated.\textsuperscript{122} It
is not surprising that it was the reform-oriented Hungarian leadership that subse-
quently suggested that meetings of experts groups should be publicized at least by
short press releases. However, these efforts were thwarted by Romania, which was
refusing \textit{glasnost} and demanded that only meetings at levels from deputy foreign
ministers upward be publicized.\textsuperscript{123}

In the early stage of Gorbachev’s rule, the Warsaw Pact member states were
probably overrating the importance of the expert groups. Their formation was
unquestionably aided by a kind of euphoria stemming from the fact that the al-
liance had started, for the first time in its history, to deal with many issues on
a truly multilateral basis. As early as in December 1985, however, it became obvi-
ous that it was not necessary to send numerous delegations to the meetings – on
the contrary, a decision was made that each member state would have just two
members in each expert group rather than three, as initially planned.\textsuperscript{124} In 1987,
the form of cooperation outlined above clearly proved as not very efficient. At the
March meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, Eduard
Shevardnadze warned that the activation of political mechanisms of the alliance
should be qualitative rather than quantitative. Although he officially commended
the last meetings of expert groups and deputy foreign ministers,\textsuperscript{125} his words indi-
cated that the number of the meetings was unnecessarily high, and their agenda

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{121} SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2 2212, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central
\bibitem{122} AMZV, f. DTO 1953–1989, Inv. No. 23, Reg. No. 10, Interview with Minister of Foreign
Affairs of the Hungarian People’s Republic on the global situation and Hungary’s foreign
\bibitem{123} Ibid., f. PK 1953–1989, Ministerial Collegium No. 22/1988, Information about the 6\textsuperscript{th}
meeting of the working group of the Warsaw Pact member states on reductions of armed
forces and conventional arms levels in Europe (Budapest, 17 and 18 December 1987),
1 January 1988.
\bibitem{124} Ibid., Ministerial Collegium No. 257, Information about the meeting of the working group
of the Warsaw Pact member states on the draft appeal calling for nuclear-free zones in Eu-
\bibitem{125} NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P32/87, Minutes of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} meeting of the Presidium of the Cen-
tral Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 30 March 1987, Item 1,
Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact
member states in Moscow, 24 and 25 March 1987.
\end{thebibliography}
and course were thus somewhat diluted. After the formation of the key Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information, the excessive number of expert groups was also criticized by Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Henryk Jaroszek, then General Secretary of the alliance, who recommended that most of their agendas be taken over by the newly established group.\(^{126}\) However, there was no willingness to disband existing expert groups\(^{127}\) even in a situation when no suitable agenda was available for them. In such cases, the expert groups were allowed to go on, but their meetings were supposed to be \textit{ad hoc}, or as needed, rather than regular.\(^{128}\) It is thus understandable that the Hungarian memorandum of March 1989, which the reform-oriented leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party used as a document supporting a review of Hungary’s attitude towards the Warsaw Treaty Organization, harshly criticized, \textit{inter alia}, the work of the expert groups. It stated that the expert groups were not preparing any information in support of decisions of leaders of the Warsaw Pact member states, were detached from political


\(^{127}\) In Gorbachev’s era, the Warsaw Treaty Organization structure included the following expert groups: for freezing and reduction of military expenditures and levels of armed forces (1986, Bucharest), for the preparation of an appeal to overcome the low level of development and to create a new international economic order (1986, Bucharest), for monitoring the reaction of NATO member states and neutral countries to the appeal of the Budapest meeting of the Political Consultative Committee (1986, Budapest), for the formation of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information (1986, Prague), for the elaboration of proposals to strengthen international cooperation in the eradication of international terrorism (1986, Moscow), for the promotion of the proposal to create a comprehensive system of international peace and security (1986, Moscow), for the strengthening of an offensive approach in matters of human rights (1987, Sofia), for the assessment of the situation in the Mediterranean (1987, Sofia), for nuclear disarmament and the creation of nuclear-free zones (1987, Moscow, with subsequent rotations), for environmental security (1988, Prague), and for Nordic matters (1988, Moscow). (NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P32/87, Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 30 March 1987, Item 1, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Moscow, 24 and 25 March 1987; \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. P49/87, Minutes of the 49th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 11 November 1987, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Prague, 28 and 29 October 1987; \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. P65/88, Minutes of the 65th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 31 March 1988, Item 4, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Sofia.)

decision-making, which they were rarely able to influence, and their increasingly intensive activities usually lacked a proper mandate.129

From 1988, Romania kept pointing at the unacceptably high number of expert groups as well.130 Nevertheless, Bucharest’s attitude to this form of political cooperation started to change substantially, as the agenda of the meetings was more and more focused on domestic developments in individual member states. The most noticeable manifestation of the trend was the formation of an expert group which was assigned a task to analyze a potential approach of the alliance’s member states to the increasingly topical issue of human rights. Apart from concessions to the Western concept of human rights, the group was also examining the “deepening of socialist democracy.” Ceauşescu’s repressive regime kept refusing to participate in the debate.131

The Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information

The outcome of long years of efforts to improve foreign policy cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty was the formation of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information, which started working in 1987. As early as at the first meeting of the Political Consultative Committee that he attended, i.e in October 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev mentioned a resolution of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs adopted two years ago, which had recommended the formation of such a group, and initiated its implementation.132 The plan won unanimous support and was to be discussed in detail at the March 1986 meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. It was anticipated that the new body would meet periodically in Moscow. It was awaited with great expectations, and an independent expert group was created to substantiate activities of the multilateral group.133

130 NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P65/88, Minutes of the 65th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 31 March 1988, Item 4, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Sofia.
131 AMZV, f. PK 1953–1989, Ministerial Collegium No. 22/88, Information about the meeting of the working group of experts of the Warsaw Pact member states responsible for preparing proposals aimed at fostering cooperation in the interest of increasing the offensive nature of political work in the field of human rights, 21 January 1988.
133 NA, f. 1261/0/8, Vol. P141/85, Minutes of the 141st meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 29 October 1985, Item 1, Results of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact member states in Sofia; Ibid., f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P3/86, Minutes of the 3rd meeting of the Presidium of
The support of the formation of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information soon developed cracks. In late autumn 1986, the plan was opposed by Romania, soon joined by Hungary. Hungarian Communist Party leaders, who had by then started reviewing their previously absolutely loyal attitude to the Warsaw Treaty Organization, demanded a limited scope of authority for the new body. In the loosening atmosphere, with the Soviets giving other member states more room, a heated debate as to where the group would operate from, broke out. Eduard Shevardnadze first made a seemingly accommodating gesture, accepting a rotation of the group’s meetings around capitals of the alliance’s member states. During the February 1987 meeting, however, the Soviets, helped by their most loyal allies – the Bulgarians, Czechoslovaks, East Germans and Poles, again attempted to locate the new group to Moscow. Hungary was leaning towards the rotation concept, and Romania was even categorically demanding it. When the Soviet leadership found out that the above technicality might block the formation of the group, they finally gave in. As a matter of fact, all member states except Hungary and Romania wished the group to be launched as soon as possible. This was why they wanted the formation of the group endorsed by next month’s meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. On the other hand, Bucharest insisted that the matter be ultimately resolved by the Political Consultative Committee the meeting of which was to take place in several months’ time. However, it withdrew its requirement later, as the inclusion of issues of the “building of socialism,” i.e. of internal developments in socialist countries, in the agenda of the new group was, in its opinion, much more important. As a matter of fact, Nicolae Ceauşescu saw closer cooperation with the Eastern Bloc states as a way to reverse the catastrophic situation of Romania’s economy in the second half of the 1980s, and was willing to make concession to achieve this goal. Bucharest thus did not hesitate to join other in order to isolate Hungary, which, on the contrary, intended to resolve its economic problems by closer cooperation with the West. It was one of the reasons why Budapest kept refusing the inclusion of “hostile activities of Western countries

---

134 Romania ultimately revised its position in exchange for a prolonged existence of the expert group for the reduction of military expenditures.

135 AMZV, f. PK 1953–1989, Ministerial Collegium No. 263, Information about the meeting of the expert group for the analysis of a potential freezing and reduction of military expenditures and armed forces, 16 October 1986.

against the Warsaw Pact member states” in the agenda of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information in addition to the “socialist upbuilding” issues.\textsuperscript{137}

At the end of the day, the issue was not resolved in an explicit manner. After all, the group, whose members were department heads of foreign ministries of member states, did not have any decision-making powers. It only assumed an exchange of information on “important topics” which, however, were not specified in detail, and its operative analyses. The group was expected to meet once a month, or \textit{ad hoc}, upon a request/proposal of a member state. Its meetings were chaired by a representative of the country which had hosted the last meeting of the Political Consultative Committee; the chairman held his office for one year.\textsuperscript{138} The relation of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information to existing political bodies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization was not defined in any way. After all, member states (except Romania) viewed its establishment as an intermediate step which was supposed to lay the groundwork for a permanent political body of the alliance.\textsuperscript{139} This was also admitted by Gorbachev during the March 1987 meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. At the same time, Bucharest continued to vociferously reject the establishment of a secretariat or political staff in any form.\textsuperscript{140} The abovementioned intention of the “Six” was somewhat ignored in the analysis of historian Andrzej Skrzypek, who views the formation of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information as a not very logical duplication of meetings of deputy foreign ministers of the alliance’s member states.\textsuperscript{141}

The first meeting of the new group took place upon request of the Polish side in Warsaw on 23 and 24 June 1987. It was publicized in the press, although regular press releases about the group’s meetings were published only from mid-1988. Unlike other political bodies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, its activities were


\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., Information about the final meeting of the expert group for the elaboration of issues related to the work of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information, 27 February 1987. According to memoirs of Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak, the Soviets wanted the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information to be a permanent political body of the alliance at the ambassadorial level, something like the North Atlantic Council (NOWAK, J.: Od hegemonii do agonii, p. 142).

\textsuperscript{140} NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P32/87, Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 30 March 1987, Item 1, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact member states in Moscow, 24 and 25 March 1987.

\textsuperscript{141} SKRZYPEK, A.: Dyplomatyczne dzieje PRL w latach 1956–1899, p. 383.
not organized and funded by the host party. Intervals between its meetings grew quickly shorter, from initial three months to less than a month. It was because of a Soviet initiative which, however, soon won general support of all. Initially, member states mainly gave reports on their planned foreign policy activities at the meetings, but the format started changing around November 1987, when first indications of the alliance’s coordinated approach to international matters began to replace mere exchange of information of top-level visits or intended initiatives.\(^{142}\)

The abovementioned Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak is rather critical about activities of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information in his memoirs. Soviet diplomats were allegedly trying to change the consultative character of its meetings into another platform to converge positions of member states before sessions of higher-level bodies of the alliance. Moreover, it allegedly proved very soon that Moscow had hierarchized initiatives presented by its allies according to its own needs, Shevardnadze’s statements about the “democratization” of relations with the allies notwithstanding. This produced aversion of reform-oriented member states to any closer cooperation within the alliance. On the other hand, Nowak admits that the Soviets took care to have a truly open discussion at the meetings. It was particularly Soviet diplomat Lev Mendelevich who was active in this respect, having become an ardent supporter of the _perestroika_ towards the end of his career and attempting to change the Warsaw Treaty Organization into a “natural alliance” and a place of “free and creative debates.” Still, Nowak claims the Multilateral Group for Mutual Exchange of Current Information\(^{143}\) never became a platform for a free exchange of information and remained a place where only official information was exchanged. Efforts to coordinate foreign policy were allegedly met with an intentionally passive attitude of dissatisfied member states and sometimes also with their (not precisely specified) resistance.

However, both primary sources and existing professional publications cast some doubt on Nowak’s conclusions. It is true that the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information discussed some topics – e.g. analyses of global developments by Soviet strategists or activities of NATO – repeatedly. However, it is not possible

---


to agree with Nowak’s claim to the effect that Moscow was abusing its exclusive position as the agenda setter to prevent discussions concerning controversial issues, i.e. socio-political crises in member states or the situation in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{144} Soviet representatives were actually informing their allies even about pressing international policy matters, including Afghanistan,\textsuperscript{145} at the group’s meetings, as confirmed, \textit{inter alia}, by historian Jordan Baev on the basis of Bulgarian sources. He also points out that practically all member states welcomed this form of foreign policy cooperation. From mid-1989, the meetings became a platform for justifying different positions and analyses of events by individual member states.\textsuperscript{146}

In mid-1988, the Warsaw Pact member states were viewing the work of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information very positively. They agreed that it had helped to expand the discussed agenda and to improve coordination of the alliance’s foreign policy line, as well as the synchronization of diplomatic activities of individual member states. Still, the group’s working mechanisms still showed substantial deficiencies. There was basically no real system in convening its meetings – in early 1988, their frequency dropped to once in every two months – and the agenda was often overlapping with issues discussed in some of the many expert groups or at meetings of deputy foreign ministers.\textsuperscript{147} It was one of the reasons why, for example, the chief of East German diplomacy Oskar Fischer appealed to his colleagues in March 1988 to give meetings of the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information a clear thematic plan and to invite other experts to them as necessary. In this respect, he emphasized that the success of the consultations did not consist in a “mass of paper,” but in a true exchange of opinions.\textsuperscript{148} In particular, setting the meetings’ dates and agenda well in advance was struggling with difficulties. Consequently, a decision was made at the end of 1988 that member states would propose issues to be discussed through their embassies and the group’s chairman would include them in the agenda depending on whether they were topical or not.\textsuperscript{149} The above measure reflected Romania’s dissatisfaction with Moscow’s tendencies

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 142.
to play the leading role in setting the agenda of the group. The abovementioned deficiencies notwithstanding, the Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information, which had had altogether 26 meetings by September 1990, was a considerable qualitative improvement if compared to the situation prevailing in political structures of the Warsaw Treaty Organization before 1985.

Parliamentary Cooperation in the Warsaw Treaty Organization

Another reflection of the deepening politicization of the Warsaw Treaty Organization during Gorbachev’s era was the effort to strengthen cooperation among legislative bodies of the Warsaw Pact member states under the aegis of the alliance. Let us remind ourselves that representatives of the parliaments had been meeting in this format from 1975. In Brezhnev’s times, the meetings tended to be very fettered, just like other meetings in political structures of the organization. It was basically just another forum providing multilateral support to Moscow’s current foreign policy course. This, after all, stemmed from the specific, and not very important, role of legislative bodies in political systems of the Eastern Bloc countries.

The first meeting of representatives of parliamentary bodies of the alliance in Gorbachev’s era took place between 1 and 3 July 1987, in Poland’s capital. It differed from the previous ones both in its form and in its content. First, it was attended by the parliaments’ speakers, not just representatives, the purpose being to emphasize the new and higher level of the meeting. Unlike the previous meetings, its outputs were not limited to a collective statement commenting on the situation in the world. There were also extensive discussions concerning the activization of parliamentary cooperation among the Warsaw Pact member states in the international arena, but, first and foremost, the “improvement of socialist democracy” or the changing role of the legislative bodies in the current stage of the “building of socialism.” It was another, although cautious attempt to discuss internal developments on the platform of official structures of the alliance. The communiqué announced that meetings of speakers of parliaments would take place every year and rotate among capitals of the Warsaw Pact member states. It should be mentioned that interparliamentary meetings had until then been held very irregularly; one of the reasons was, inter alia, Romania’s frequently manifested and ostentatious distaste to them. However, Nicolae Giosan, Chairman of Romania’s Great National Assembly, now proclaimed

unequivocal support to the proposed cooperation format as a result of Bucharest’s changed attitude to political cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization.\footnote{NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P41/87, Minutes of the 41st meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 8 July 1987, Item 7, Report on the meeting of chairmen of parliaments of the Warsaw Pact member states held on 1 to 3 July 1987; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2224, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 6 June 1987, Annex No. 9 to Minutes No. 23.}

The member states thus basically agreed to a substantial expansion of the agenda of future meetings. However, each of them had its own vision regarding the specific form of the innovated interparliamentary cooperation within the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and all the visions reflected the absence of a concept and attempts to improvise in an unknown political situation. Poland and Bulgaria were proposing a union of parliaments of the Warsaw Pact member states, modelled after the European Parliament. The German Democratic Republic was recommending the formation of an unspecified parliamentary cooperation body within the Political Consultative Committee. On the other hand, the Soviet Union announced that the parliamentary meetings did not have to be held only within the Warsaw Treaty Organization, but could be expanded to the CMEA as well.\footnote{Ibid.} From 1988, however, Moscow was rather leaning towards the formation of a joint parliamentary body on the platform of the Warsaw Pact, something like the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The fact that contacts between parliaments of member states of both alliances had been growing at an unprecedented rate at that time had definitely something to do with the Soviet stance.\footnote{MASTNÝ, V. – BYRNE, M. (ed.): A Cardboard Castle?, p. 62.} Eduard Shevardnadze urged the formation of such a body at the March 1988 meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Sofia. Poland was very active in this respect. During the unofficial part of the meeting, it announced, through its Foreign Minister Marian Orzechowski, that it would present its own proposal for a joint interparliamentary organization of the Warsaw Pact member states before the next meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The Poles argued that such a step might strengthen the alliance’s position on the international scene. However, the lack of clarity of the concept was illustrated by the final Polish proposal, which recommended establishing a European Parliamentary Council open for all states of the old continent. Its permanent secretariat was to be located in Warsaw.\footnote{NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P65/88, Minutes of the 65th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 31 March 1988, Item 4, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Sofia.} The loudest representative of concepts of interparliamentary cooperation purely within the Warsaw Treaty Organization was the May 1988 initiative of East Germany. It assumed the formation of a Committee of Parliaments of Member States, an equivalent of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the structure of the alliance’s bodies. It was expected, first and
foremost, to promote and interpret conclusions of the Political Consultative Committee at the level of parliaments, send joint delegations to international forums, such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe or disarmament talks in Geneva and Vienna, and present positions of the member states’ parliaments there. The committee was also to have a small secretariat.  

The East German concept was very close to what actually transpired during the next meeting of parliament speakers, which took place on 14 to 16 September 1988, in East Berlin. It discussed the coordination of activities of parliamentary bodies of the Warsaw Pact member states in the implementation of resolutions of the Political Consultative Committee, promotion of the alliance’s latest peace initiatives, and the best ways to exert influence upon parliaments of other countries, the European Parliament, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, or the Nordic Council. At the same time, it discussed the course of the perestroika and its variants in each Warsaw Pact member state. It was assumed that the speakers/chairmen of the parliaments would, from then on, always meet early in autumn, i.e. between the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee and that of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The agenda was to include topical issues, such as developments of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe process, disarmament talks, and the development of trade between the East and the West.

The formation of the interparliamentary body within the Warsaw Treaty was ultimately rejected by Romania. At that time, Nicolae Ceauşescu presented his own proposal of a profound reform of the alliance, in which there was no place for such an institution. At the Berlin meeting of the speakers and chairmen of parliaments, Nicolae Giosan thus stated, on the one hand, that he did not have a mandate to discuss the establishment of a collective body or a joint declaration, but, on the other hand, supported continuing interparliamentary meetings – after all, the next one was to be hosted, according to the principle of rotation, by Romania’s capital in 1989. Giosan also emphasized Bucharest’s willingness to cooperate with parliaments of the Warsaw Pact member states both bilaterally and in broader international structures, such as the Interparliamentary Union. The purely utilitarian position of Ceauşescu’s regime was underlined by Giosan’s statement to the effect that Romania did not rule out a possibility to join the Warsaw Pact’s interparliamentary body in the future. Other member states decided to avoid confrontation

158 Each country was supposed to have one representative in the secretariat, whose activities were to be purely technical and predominantly consist in planning the agenda of the Committee of Parliaments and in submitting proposals for contacts with other parliamentary institutions. (SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2269, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 19 April 1988, Annex No. 12 to Minutes No. 16.)

159 Ibid.; NA, f. 1261/0/9, Vol. P77/88, Minutes of the 77th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held on 29 June 1988, Item 8, Invitation to the meeting of chairmen/speakers of Parliaments of the Warsaw Pact member states in Berlin.

160 SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2285, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 19 July 1988, Annex No. 2 to Minutes No. 28.
and instead attempted to cooperate with Romania in a constructive manner. East Germany therefore proposed to enhance cooperation of legislative bodies under the aegis of the Warsaw Treaty Organization even in the absence of an appropriate institution. The Berlin meeting resolved that the possibility of establishing an association of parliaments of socialist states, rather than the Warsaw Treaty Organization, was to be discussed by a working ground under the leadership of Ryszard Wojna, Chairman of the Foreign Committee of the Polish Sejm.

East Berlin continued to be active in this respect. Honecker’s leadership decided to present, during the meeting of parliament speakers of European countries, the US and Canada scheduled to take place in Warsaw on 26 to 28 November 1988, a proposal to establish a Council for Parliamentary Cooperation of the Warsaw Pact Member States, albeit without Romania. They justified their move by ongoing improvements of the international situation, the strengthening of economic, environmental, scientific, technical, cultural and humanitarian cooperation and the need to establish contact with other regional parliamentary institutions. With a view to Romania, the statutes of the Council explicitly stipulated that other countries could join it as well. The overall helplessness and vagueness of concepts of further cooperation of legislative bodies within the Warsaw Treaty Organization was appropriately illustrated by parallel contemplations of Moscow. These were returning to a broader model of an interparliamentary association of “socialist and progressively oriented countries,” which could be joined, for example, by Yugoslavia. After all, the relatively minor importance and benefits of the existing interparliamentary cooperation under the auspices of the alliance were also mentioned in a memorandum for leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’

161 Ibid.
162 Ibid., DY 30/J IV 2/2/2295, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 20 September 1988, Annex No. 8 to Minutes No. 38.
163 The document declared, inter alia, that the Council for Parliamentary Cooperation was to assist the formation of a general international security system. In addition, it was supposed to discuss economic integration of member states, thus becoming a tool for the development of new economic relations among Eastern Block countries. Due to the changing international atmosphere, the Council was also anticipated to deal with cultural and humanitarian issues, and even guarantee compliance with individual rights and liberties. It was perhaps East Germany’s libation to Moscow, Budapest and Warsaw, which had already been actively involving themselves in the issues mentioned above by 1988. There were to be three types of bodies operating within the Council – an assembly consisting of 10 representatives of each country, a presidium comprising one representative from each member state, and commissions established by the presidium. There was also a plan to open a secretariat in Warsaw. The Council was expected to meet once a year, under the principle of rotation, and to be chaired by a representative of the host nation. The working language was to be Russian. (Ibid., DY 30 J IV 2/2/2300, Statut des Rates für parlamentarische Zusammenarbeit, undated, 1988.)
164 Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 25 October 1988, Annex No. 7 to Minutes No. 43.
165 Ibid., DY 30 J IV 2/2/2292, Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, 6 September 1988, Annex No. 6 to Minutes No. 35.
Party of March 1989, which analyzed potential future approaches of Hungary to the Warsaw Treaty Organization. It, however, welcomed the intention to establish an interparliamentary body within the alliance.166

* * *

The future of interparliamentary cooperation within the Warsaw Pact became a part of broader negotiations concerning an overall profound reform of the organization. Unlike in the second half of the 1960s and partly also in the first half of the 1970s, discussions about the reform during Gorbachev’s era were not a key factor influencing practical functioning of the alliance’s political structures, at least until the summer of 1988. It is true that representatives of member states, in particular the Soviet Union and the Polish People’s Republic, had often spoken at relevant meetings about the necessity to support ongoing changes in cooperation within the alliance by establishing a permanent secretariat or by expanding the powers of the alliance’s Secretary General,167 but the real debate about the reform of the Warsaw Treaty Organization was prompted only by abovementioned Ceauşescu’s proposal of July 1988. It assumed fundamental institutional changes, such as the dissolution of the Political Consultative Committee and a possibility of the position of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces being rotated among representatives of all member states rather than being assigned exclusively to Soviet marshals.168 Let us add that the rotation idea went beyond the common practice in NATO, where the comparable position was always assigned to US generals


commanding US troops in Europe (SACEUR). The fact that Moscow surprisingly did not reject the idea straightaway is a proof of profound changes of relations among Eastern Bloc countries going on at that time.\textsuperscript{169} The debate on the reform of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which was going on in 1988 and 1989, reflected not only shifts in the workings of the alliance after Gorbachev’s coming to power, but, first and foremost, rapid changes of the international situation and domestic developments in each member state, which started to affect their foreign policy as well. The end of 1989 and the fall of state socialism dictatorships in Eastern Europe brought contemplations about the future form of the alliance to a rapid end.

Historian Vladislav Zubok notes that Gorbachev liked using phrases such as “unpredictability,” “let the process unfold,” or “matter of course.”\textsuperscript{170} They characterized well his attitude to the Warsaw Pact. He often initiated fairly significant changes in the organization, but he rarely promoted their implementation in an assertive manner. Still, his greater openness and urgings aimed at the allies scored at least a temporary success. Occasional criticism and increasing difficulties which the Eastern Bloc was facing in the second half of the 1980s notwithstanding, political structures of the Warsaw Pact started operating, for the first time in their history, in a stabilized manner after 1985. They became a place for a flexible exchange and sharing of information and presentations of common foreign policy positions or initiatives. The West was also taking the Warsaw Treaty Organization seriously. Problems that are usually pointed to did not stem so much from poorly set mechanisms of the alliance, but rather reflected the dead end which the Eastern Bloc as a whole and the system of mutual relations among its members, which had been built for previous four decades, found themselves in. In this respect, the conclusion of historian Vojtěch Mastný holds true, namely that the Warsaw Treaty Organization was never the prime mover or catalyst of changes in the Soviet sphere of interest. On the contrary – its internal developments reflected, and possibly facilitated, such changes, reacting to a broader political dynamism in the Eastern Bloc.\textsuperscript{171}

Some advocates of Gorbachev argue that no one had any clue how to reform a “totalitarian country” such as the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s, which was why there was no other way but trials and errors.\textsuperscript{172} There is again a parallel with the Warsaw Pact: was there any guaranteed recipe how to reform a specific international organization that had been under directive management for such a long time? One of the reasons why the reform of political structures of the Warsaw Treaty Organization was not in the focus of interest might be that their activities had somehow been consolidated during early years of Gorbachev’s rule, and it therefore was not quite clear what was the desired purpose of the changes. Available documents show that the functioning of the alliance in the second half of the 1980s was not a frequent topic of bilateral talks of diplomats and politicians of

\textsuperscript{169} LUŇÁK, P. (ed.): \textit{Plánování nemyslitelného \[Planning the unthinkable\]}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{170} ZUBOK, V.: \textit{A Failed Empire}, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{171} MASTNÝ, V. – BYRNE, M. (ed.): \textit{A Cardboard Castle?}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{172} ZUBOK, V.: \textit{A Failed Empire}, p. 314.
the member states, which continued to be an important form of cooperation and communication in the Eastern Bloc. During such meetings, the Warsaw Pact tended to be mentioned or referred to just marginally and in general terms (if at all),\textsuperscript{173} which was in contrast with the situation that had prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s. It was an indication of the organization’s stability, the functioning of which was not regarded as a pressing issue. Still, attempts to strengthen the Warsaw Treaty Organization from inside and to add new cementing elements to its structure failed, as its relatively quick and trouble-free demise later showed.


Translated by Jiří Mareš

Abstract
The study analyzes the functioning of political structures of the Warsaw Treaty organization between the advent of Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev and the collapse of the state socialist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe in the end of the 1989, which has hitherto been examined only superficially. Using results of research in Czech, German,

and Polish archives and drawing from studies of published documents, it describes in
detail the substantial changes in the day-to-day operation of political structures of
the organization, which took place at that time. It attempts to clarify and evaluate
the essence of these shifts, to assess them in the context of previous developments, and
to outline their significance for the fate of the Warsaw Treaty after 1989. It shows
that Gorbachev initiated fairly significant changes in the organization, but he rarely
promoted their implementation in an assertive enough manner. However, the greater
openness toward and incentives presented to the allies, which characterized the ap-
proach of the Soviet Secretary General, were only partly successful. On the one hand,
the political structures of the Warsaw Treaty started working in a routine manner for
the first time in the history of the organization since 1985, becoming a venue where
information was shared and foreign policy viewpoints and initiatives of member states
were presented, the deepening crisis of the Eastern Bloc notwithstanding. On the other
hand, however, day-to-day problems in the operation of the political structures of the
Warsaw Treaty persisted, reflecting the impasse the Eastern Bloc as a whole and the
system of relations between its member states, built in the previous four decades, found
itself in. Before 1989, the Warsaw Treaty organization was unable to strengthen itself
sufficiently enough, and the collapse of the then existing political regimes in Central
and Eastern Europe doomed it to an early demise.

Keywords
Warsaw Treaty; Eastern Bloc; international relations; Cold War; Mikhail Gorbachev